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Timothy Jenkins, Religion in Everyday Life: An Ethnographic Approach (New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), pp. xv + 256

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Book reviews

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G. Theissen, *Gospel Writing and Church Politics: A Socio-Rhetorical Approach* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2001), pp. xiii + 194. £10.00 (\$15.00).

This volume of essays is the third publication in the Chuen King Lecture Series, established in 1996 in the Theology Division of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The wider aim of the whole series is to provide biblical resources for contextualising Christian theology in the contemporary Chinese setting. These four essays on church politics in Mark, Matthew, Luke–Acts and John by Gerd Theissen are followed by three short responses from young scholars from Hong Kong, as well as a sermon preached by Theissen during his visit there.

The volume summarises Theissen's work on the Gospel, and exemplifies the 'socio-rhetorical approach', which involves analysis of five tasks of the Gospel author: (1) exploration of the author's legitimisation of his voice as the voice of the community; (2) analysis of the way the Gospel orients its readers to the world, and (3) to Judaism; identification of the means whereby the author seeks (4) to resolve conflicts, and (5) to give shape to the structure of authority, within the group.

Although there is little attention to wider theological questions, there might in Theissen's exploration of the 'canonical' status of the Gospel texts be material of use in the task of constructive theology. He notes in his preface that as far as the first century is concerned, '[e]ven if the Gospels do not belong to a catalogue of canonical writings since such a catalogue did not yet exist in the beginning of Early Christianity, they have had a canonical quality from the outset' (p. viii). Theissen detects in the Gospels a tendency towards the relativisation of hierarchical authority structures, with the result that absolute authority is invested in Jesus as he is mediated through the Gospel texts themselves. For example, in the case of Matthew, '[a]ll other authorities cease to exist where Jesus becomes teacher (that is, where the Gospel of Matthew is acknowledged, read and practiced)' (p. 78). Theissen applies the same principle to Mark (pp. 38–9) and John (pp. 156–7). The authoritative claim made by a Gospel in its very composition should perhaps receive more attention in historical and theological accounts of the formation of the canon *stricto sensu*.

Theissen's historical reconstructions of the process of composition are often questionable, however. Many, for example, will find in his thesis that 'the Gospel of Mark documents a replacement of itinerant charismatics as decisive authorities' (p. 33) overzealous mirror-reading, while for Theissen this is one of Mark's more obvious points. Further, no reference is made to recent scholarship which questions seeing the Gospels primarily in relation to specific communities. R. J. Bauckham's edited volume *The Gospels for All Christians* (T. & T. Clark, 1998) is particularly important on this issue. (Francis Watson's contribution to the book regards Bauckham's arguments as demonstrating that 'the hypothesis that the Gospels were shaped by and addressed to the problems of a specific community is not just flawed or one-sided but simply wrong', p. 195).

Again, in his analysis of pre-Gospel traditions there is a hasty atomisation of certain aspects of Jesus' ministry, such as that the 'triumphalistic' miracle-traditions stand in contradiction to the *theologia crucis* of the passion traditions. As for Theissen's treatment of sources, his confident assertion that Matthew corrects M, the Matthean special source (p. 31), is very difficult to verify or falsify, yet this becomes the basis for an important aspect of Theissen's view of Matthew: that the Gospel, because it combines Jewish-Christian and gentile-Christian traditions, is also attempting to reconcile Jewish-Christian and gentile-Christian communities (p. 54; cf p. 70).

The series editor's preface to the book expresses the concern of contemporary Chinese Christians to contextualise the work of Western scholarship in their Asian situation (pp. v–vi). This book aims to begin that process through the responses (which largely agree with Theissen, with occasional dispute over points of detail), but there is little evidence of this here. The volume is particularly useful as a summary of Theissen's work on the Gospels, which has appeared in several monographs over the past 25 years. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether Chinese theology can be invigorated by the approach to the Gospels offered here.

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Timothy Jenkins, *Religion in Everyday Life: An Ethnographic Approach* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), pp. xv + 256.

Timothy Jenkins essays a new ethnographically grounded theory of religion in England in this insightful volume. Contrasting Steve Bruce's reliance on statistics and anecdotes in his account of secularisation in Britain, *Religion in Modern Britain* (Oxford University Press, 1995) with Grace Davie's more nuanced work on the sociology of Anglicanism, Jenkins argues that in order

to understand the role of religion in contemporary England it is necessary to examine the complex range of symbols, meanings and relational interactions through which people interpret the practices of life and in which may still be found signs of transcendence. Jenkins believes that social theorists and theologians have much to learn from ethnographic descriptions of the empirical forms of religious life in particular terrains, and the substance of the book is two elegaic ethnographic accounts of such terrains: the first a country church, St Mary's, in the village of Comberton near Cambridge, the second a portrait of the community of Kingswood, near Bristol, as gathered for the annual Whit Walk.

Comberton is a village which Jenkins characterises as constituted by two identities which, though not impermeable, nonetheless shape the behaviour of its residents. The one is a self-sufficient agricultural community whose vestiges remain in the villagers who now inhabit the council houses on the fringe of the village. The other is a commuter community who own most of the old and many of the new houses in the village but who derive employment, entertainment and much else from the nearby city of Cambridge. The parish church forms a site where these two communities together symbolise and rehearse their respective histories and lifestyles. Locals have a conservative sense for the history of the church, and their perception of its ministry is focused around rehearsing an ancient liturgy, maintaining a beautiful building, a vicar who regularly visits village households, and a cycle of annual events, liturgical, social and financial, through which the agricultural year is ritualised and the wider village drawn into the life of the church, and into supporting it financially. The incomers, on the other hand, are happy to adopt the new liturgies of the Church of England, which represent their own modern urban egalitarian values, and are aware of the limitations of traditional social events for financing the church and prefer covenanting by church members as a more inflation-proof approach. For incomers, the purpose of the church is not so much to solidify and ritualise the cycle of life in the village and its surrounding countryside as to stimulate and sustain the religious life of the church's members. Bible study groups or prayer meetings are therefore much to be preferred over 'secular' events such as fund-raising fetes.

Kingswood is an area of working- and lower middle-class housing to the east of Bristol whose history is much shaped by coal mining and Methodism. Around 3,000 people take part in the annual Whit Walk with floats and bands and banners, and they are watched by at least another 3,000. The route of the Walk proceeds along the principal streets of Kingswood and passes near to 11 churches or chapels. The Walk brings together families and communities that inhabit the area in a gathering which Jenkins finds draws together all

the complex threads of life in this contemporary English urban community. Jenkins traces a number of different fragments of predecessor events which shaped the lives of Kingswood's present inhabitants and whose influence may still be discerned in the Whit Walk and its participants. He notes in particular the importance of the motif of conversion deriving from Methodist history and its transformative effects on working-class culture in generating the values of piety, thrift and respectability, which still characterise many families in the area. The central claim of Jenkins's account of Kingswood is that persons and churches and chapels are constituted *locally* by their association with a particular terrain in which, and among whose people, reside a set of memories, values and identities that have spiritual, social and geographical depth.

Jenkins finds both the country church at Comberton and the Whit Walk at Kingswood to be complex but significant instances of what Émile Durkheim called 'social facts'. The meanings of these social facts are not accessible to statistical measure of the kind deployed by advocates of the secularisation thesis. And they are also more complex than the universalising rhetoric of those who decry the corrosion of 'community' as a consequence of mobility and the technologies of the motor car and the television can allow. The identity of the people of Kingswood, Jenkins contends, is still marked by the shaping and transforming impacts of coal mining and of Methodism, and current transformations can only be understood in the light of these fragmented memories, which are still preserved in the terrain.

Through these essays Jenkins makes the claim that religion persists in English culture but that it is not contained by its institutional forms. Instead the indigenous people of Kingswood, and of Comberton, express a range of psychic and spiritual beliefs about matter and the supernatural that are also found implicitly in their aspiration to human flourishing, and in the continuing conservative force of family life, in which values, identities and the sacred are transmitted. In this important study Jenkins gives us a thoroughly Durkheimian and Maussian view of social reality and of the mutually constitutive character of religious rituals and foci and the particular communities of place of which an apparently mobile and superficially homogenous urbanised social order, such as contemporary England, is still constructed.

Theologians and social theorists may find their concerns and interests dealt with only sparsely and indirectly in this volume. However, Jenkins gives more than a hint that he has more to tell us about the implications of this ground-breaking approach for the practices of religion in modern England, and the theological description of the same. And we may expect that this 'more' will be truly insightful, for Jenkins already shares with us in

this record of his own anthropological research an insightful redescription of the place of religion in contemporary English culture.

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Ronald E. Heine, *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. xii + 297. £50.00 (\$80.00).

Andrew Louth, *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. xvii + 327. £45.00 (\$70.00).

These two fine contributions to the distinguished series of Oxford Early Christian Studies make an interesting contrast. Professor Heine deals with biblical exegesis from the founding father of the discipline, Origen, as rendered into Latin and 'improved' by Jerome, Professor Louth with the theologian who bequeathed us his treasury summarising 500 years and more of Greek patristic thought. We know a good deal about Origen, even more about Jerome, and little about John, whose personal history remains, probably by his intention, almost wholly in the shadows. Professor Heine's is a technical monograph and, like Professor Louth's book, well written and accessible to the non-specialist reader.

The interest of this commentary (I deliberately use the singular) on the Ephesians lies in the light it sheds on Origen's approach to the exegesis of Paul and secondly on Jerome's approach to Origen. The least pleasing aspect of patristic theology is generally reckoned to be its biblical interpretation. The play of imaginative fancy so often met there irritates and alarms. But with the Pauline epistles there was always less room for fancy since the text itself presented difficulties to the literal understanding. Paul's language and literary style were quite regularly remarked and tacitly or overtly rebuked by commentators. Origen and Jerome were no exceptions. The patristic commentator had to explain the difficulties and apparent solecisms, and modern biblical exegetes ought to attend even harder than they at present do to the explanations, not least because Paul's language was the commentator's and is not theirs. It would, for example, save the error, corrected by no less than Severian of Gabala and Cyril of Alexandria, of misreading the syntax of 2 Cor 5:19 to make Paul, instead of saying that 'God was, in Christ, reconciling the world to himself', make the banal assertion that 'God was in Christ', presumably like one box inside another. Origen, and Jerome after him, are useful guides at this closely literal level. Origen wrote his commentary, according to Professor Heine, probably 'in the period after his move to Caesarea in AD 232–3 but before the composition of the commentary on

Romans in c. AD 244'. These are the only two Pauline commentaries by Origen that have come down, if not complete and in their original form, at least in extensive Greek excerpts and in Latin translation. Of the two catenae containing these excerpts, the version in the 11th-century BN manuscript Coislin 204 is preferred to the reduced selection in the 9th/10th-century Athos *Pantocrator* 28.

Jerome wrote his commentary on Ephesians between 386 and 388. 'Wrote' implies too creative an act; 'compiled' would more nicely characterise it, since he was to acknowledge later that in his commentary he had 'followed Origen, Didymus and Apollinarius'. The 'following' of Origen is extremely close, so close that Harnack could suggest that Jerome's was, to all intents and purposes, Origen in Latin. From the way that Professor Heine sets out the translated texts in parallel where Origen's exists and with italics in Jerome to indicate where the consanguinity may be deduced, we can see that this is not quite so. The *Nachleben* of this translation was to be agitated. In 393, after a meeting with Epiphanius the hereseologist, Jerome became a severe critic of Origen's account of human nature and of the last things. When Rufinus published his translation of Origen's *De Principiis*, Jerome savaged him, and in turn Rufinus pointed to Jerome's own exegetical work, and in particular to this commentary on Ephesians, to prove Jerome's bad faith, who had repeated Origen's teaching in the past with approval. The passages from Jerome's letters and his defence against Rufinus are given in translation here in an appendix. Jerome had closely followed Origen in interpretations that implied teachings of the pre-existence and descent of souls and of an ultimate and universal restoration or *apocatastasis*. Jerome's answer was that the passages of his commentary in question were capable of an 'orthodox' interpretation. Professor Heine doubts the validity of that reply. There is little to be gained by attempting to settle the score between Jerome and Rufinus. I confess, however, to feeling now more sympathy than before with Jerome after reading afresh the words of the two contestants in this lucid translation. There are some lines in the epistle that are difficult to understand, and the theology present there of election and predestination and in general of the nature of the church invites intellectual vertigo. Origen certainly alludes to his 'system', but the allusions are not aggressive. You have to be a close reader to pick them up. Moreover, surely it was one thing to read 'heterodox' suggestions in a biblical commentary which followed in a tradition of commentaries by various theologians whose dogmas might or might not suit later readerships, but another thing to have those same dogmas thrust in your face in a work of fundamental theology, as *De Principiis* was. I suppose the message found by the church as a whole embedded in this controversy over Origen and his legacy was

that you have to be careful. Cyril of Alexandria's wise words from his Letter to Eulogius may well have saved the selection of extracts from Origen in Basil and Gregory Nazianzen's *Philocalia* (they are quoted by the scribe): 'We need not eschew all the things spoken by heretics for they say many of the same things as ourselves'. It is certainly striking how the ancient catenae cheerfully include extracts from writers deemed unreliable and suspect. It was inevitable that the church would dump Origen's system since it was a legacy impossible to accept in full. But there was much worth conserving, and that included exegesis that has lasted, even though unrecognised as Origen's.

Professor Louth has set himself the formidable task of expounding the theology of about the most conservative theologian there ever was to a generation that, however much it relishes the conserving of nature, has no conception of the conservation of valid ideas. His subtitle says it all: 'tradition is everything, originality is nothing'. For Mansur ibn Sarjun, to give John his Arabic birth name, it was paramount that he should not sacrilegiously remove the ancient landmarks, nor say anything but what was found in the Fathers. This is a theology for which *kainos* ('novel') and *kenos* ('empty') are as identical in meaning as they are in utterance when a Greek pronounces the words. What Damian, non-Chalcedonian pope of Alexandria, said 150-odd years before would have been said also by John with pride: 'Nobody can indicate a word of ours or syllable, thought, mode of discussion or logical deduction, which is not gathered and gleaned from collecting the crumbs which fall from the loaf of doctrine'.

John's exposition of the faith is a synthesis of phrases and concepts taken from the classic masters. He stands at the end of a development which starts with the free-floating speculations of Origen, spans the vigorous interplay of debate that goes on in the fourth- and fifth-century searches for the truth about God, his Christ and Spirit, and which culminates in the legacy of Maximus. Harnack saw in John only the precursor of the schoolmen. Indeed, when John writes that the basic error of heretics is to identify *physis* and *hypostasis*, it is easy to see that Harnack had a point. He carps, though, and his habitual disgust with Eastern Christianity and its account of Christ shows. It was natural that it should, since in John's exposition all that is significant in Eastern doctrine is there in a nutshell. But such carping is and always was futile; it now looks so quaint, so in need of a historical note.

Professor Louth accomplishes with most admirable skill the historical theologian's real task of frank and sympathetic exposition. His book has three parts. The first tells us all we know about the immediate circumstances of John's life. Intellectually a son of Byzantium though he never set foot in the empire, he wrote against Islam with some knowledge of it and against

the iconoclasts. There are puzzles about the range of his influence during his lifetime and the public he addressed. What is certain is that his work only became of enormous importance with the translation into Latin of his great compendium, *The Fountain Head of Knowledge*, and its consequent authority for Western theologians as guide to Greek theology. The manuscript tradition of this work, as of the rest of John's legacy, has some quirks, now largely resolved by Kotter's edition. I ought also to point out that the NPNF translation is, like that of Hilary in the same volume (Series Two, vol. 9), unreliable in the most disconcerting way: you cannot be certain that it is *wrong*. Part 2, 'Faith and Logic', sets out the teaching of the compendium, which dealt first with logical grammar, then with the main heresies including Islam, and thirdly with positive exposition of the Catholic faith. What Professor Louth gives us here with this account of the positive exposition of the faith is, in effect, a guide to Greek patristic divinity. The *reportage* is throughout expert and readable. I particularly valued the account of John's defence of two wills in Christ: brief and to the point about a difficult concept. Professor Louth usefully draws attention more than once to John's tendency (as it was that of the tradition he followed) to insist on 'the complementarity of Trinitarian theology and Christology'. It is a point worth attending to in any irenic and truly historical thinking about the *Filioque*. Part 3, 'Faith and Images', looks at John's treatises against the iconoclasts, at his surviving sermons, his approach to prayer and finally his poetry. Unlisted in the bibliography is Professor Louth's excellent translation of the treatises (St Vladimir Seminary Press, New York, 2003), which makes this aspect of John's work so much more accessible. It is good to see it presented in the context of John's religious faith and practice. The treatises themselves, brilliant though they are, were neither quoted much nor perhaps widely circulated in John's lifetime. This is explicable, according to Professor Louth, if they are seen as belonging to a phase of the controversy that was transcended comparatively early. John defended the veneration of icons on grounds of faith as fundamental as in Irenaeus's defence of Christianity against gnosticism. Later in the iconoclastic controversy the issue turned upon (degenerated into?) technical Christology. The moment of immediate relevance had passed though not the value of the treatises themselves, which nonetheless had some influence, it is suggested, on the Seventh Oecumenical Synod. The tone of the treatises varies, and it is to the first that we are invited to attend most closely, for here the argument takes the highest ground. The second palls, or shocks according to taste, with its anti-Jewish polemics. But it is fair to require the present-day reader of the Fathers to overlook the Holocaust. John is no more distressing than any of the rest. For the ordinary Eastern Christian it was John as liturgical poet who evidently meant most. His work here is

illustrated with translations from the various odes and troparia he composed which have adorned the Greek liturgy and give it that peculiar glow of warm devotion.

Professor Louth closes with an epilogue which compares John with another figure, Bede, John's near contemporary. Both lived at the edges of what had once been the Roman empire. Together they are often counted as the last Fathers, the final representatives of their line. Perhaps the comparison does not quite work, but it makes a neat and touching conclusion to a lively, intelligent and deeply learned monograph which puts the reader in touch with one of Christianity's most influential writers. I cannot write 'most interesting': John is too condensed, too serious. But he remains the great 'Enquire Within' on all that is important on patristic divinity.

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David Cheetham, *John Hick: A Critical Introduction and Reflection* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 189. £39.95.

In what is sure to be regarded as a landmark study, David Cheetham's work *John Hick* provides a descriptive account of 'Hick's speculative theology and philosophy' and encapsulates the ongoing debates between Hick and his critics. As a lecturer in theology at the University of Birmingham, Cheetham has expertise in philosophical theology, Christianity and other religions, and issues concerning life after death that places him in a unique position to interact with Hick.

'Faith and knowledge' (Part One) focuses on Hick's epistemology. Cheetham observes that Hick 'does not believe that one can, or should, separate religious knowing from others forms of knowing' (p. 9). Since our beliefs are influenced by the totality of our experience ('experience-as'), it follows that they are similar to sense perceptions rather than a set of propositions. Hick also outlines a three-step epistemological structure (physical, moral, religious) that posits an increasing cognitive freedom in interpreting our world as well as validating our religious experiences *prima facie*. In response to non-realists and logical positivists, Hick claims that religion possesses a cognitive nature ('fact-asserting') and attempts to establish an 'empirical criterion for rendering statements meaningful' (p. 37).

In Part Two Cheetham delineates Hick's Irenaean theodicy. Hick rejects the Augustinian model (it's mythological, illogical, ineffective) and replaces it with the Irenaean position. This position entails four traits: (a) the destiny of human beings is to become like God; (b) this journey of living with sin

is difficult and complex; (c) evil came about due to human weakness; and (d) suffering is not punitive but remedial. Hick also maintains that the universe is religiously ambiguous because each person has been created with 'epistemic distance' (freedom to move towards or away from God). Moreover, since the soul-process cannot reach its full potential in this life, Hick proposes 'an afterlife in which this soul-making journey will continue until all are saved (universalism)' (p. 60).

Part Three deals with death and eternal life. Finding support from parapsychology studies (telepathy, near-death experiences, ESP), Hick prefers a dualistic interpretation of the mind/brain discussion. Despite similarities between thoughts and chemical reactions in the brain, Hick nevertheless 'argues that "thoughts" and "electro-chemical reactions" seem to be different realities' (p. 69). Upon death, our disembodied selves wait to be re-embodied with our new replicated body. In replication, the 'exact "replica" of [the] person appears in another space (whilst the old body remains in this space)' in order to continue our soul-making journey (p. 88).

Hick's treatment of pareschatology constitutes Part Four. The motto 'many lives, many worlds' aptly depicts Hick's 'synthesis of eastern and western conceptions of the afterlife' (p. 128). Death is no longer viewed as the final enemy. Rather, death is a 'meaningful boundary that separates and gives shape to our many lives' (p. 113). Hick's idea of reincarnation synthesises the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Western spiritualism, and H. H. Price's view of the afterlife (wish-fulfilment).

Part Five addresses Hick's notion of religious pluralism. Hick's pluralism has gained impetus from interacting with people of other religions (people of different faiths were neither noticeably better nor worse than Christians). Consequently, no one religion can assert its superiority. In his attempt to explain the existence of the different religions of the world Hick incorporates Kant's distinction between the world as it really is (*noumena*) and the perceived world (*phenomena*). In brief, Hick contends that different religions are phenomenological manifestations of the ultimate noumena (the Real).

An added bonus to Cheetham's work is the author's own speculations. For instance, in his discussion of personal ownership and identity Cheetham proposes a theory of 'universal transformation' (p. 88). By harmonising the patristic view, Hick's replica view, and new physics Cheetham's theory 'maintains the *sense* of the idea of the original particles being involved, but reinterprets this as a "replication" of the person using the inter-related matter of this space' (*ibid.*).

Despite these benefits, I still have two critical remarks to highlight. First, Cheetham's book could be strengthened if he took a more critical stance.

In my opinion, Hick's critics land a few punches but they fail to register on Cheetham's scorecard. I will cite two examples. G. Stanley Kane has maintained that Hick cannot hold to both notions of epistemic distance and universalism coherently. Since we have the freedom to develop towards or away from Divine Being/Ultimate Reality, then it follows that a Divine Being/Ultimate Reality cannot coerce us to be saved/liberated. Hick attempts to explain the apparent incoherence by suggesting that we possess a spiritual predisposition towards God. However, this only complicates matters because Hick also believes in the voluntary nature of religious belief.

Julius Lipner has argued that the Ultimate Reality must be personal for two reasons: (1) our religious response to the Real implies an initial act from the Real; and (2) only persons take the initiative to communicate. In short, things cannot initiate. Cheetham observes that Hick addresses this objection in the context of 'the human soteriological level' (p. 146), noting that something can be literally true of the Real in theistic or non-theistic religions but only mythological truth in itself. However, Hick has not answered Lipner's objection because the question still remains: How is it possible for a non-personal entity to take the initiative to communicate?

Second, Cheetham fails to give Hick's Christology the attention it deserves. Rather than treating it as a section for exposition, the author interprets it as a sub-category under religious pluralism. This is surprising given the fact that 'Hick is famous for a book which he edited called *The Myth of God Incarnate*' and also published *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (p. 148). While Hick's other books (*Faith and Knowledge*, *Evil and the God of Love*, *Death and Eternal Life*) receive appropriate attention in this study, Cheetham's treatment of Hick's Christology is neglectful.

My critical remarks notwithstanding, Cheetham's book is destined to become a standard in outlining the corpus and contribution of John Hick. In short, it is stimulating reading and recommended for interacting with John Hick.

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